

Irregular publication for members of the Town Planning Research Group (not for general publication or republication)

This Issue:

Measurement of the "quality of Life" in Urban Environment
(cont.)

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(Note: Most of these items have a bearing on the November discussion of the T.R.G. which is the third continuation of the popular subject: "What standards would raise the quality of local community life ?")

I. Measuring Children's Play Needs

(Reviewed by Gamma.)

1/16/8

A child: "I like to play run-out but around flats where I live there is nowhere to hide".

A parent: "Both sides of the street are lined with parked cars, they get playing hide-and-seek and get excited and the next thing they dash onto the road"

A child: "I think it should be allowed for children to shout"

A parent: "My children were playing rounders and a woman came out---she's got no children---and said: 'you've got the park to play in'---"

These are random quotes from "Children's Play on Housing Estates". This study was published by the British Ministry of Technology as one of the National Building Studies Research Papers. It is based on systematic observations on 12 housing estates (3 in provincial cities and 9 in London), and, in addition, a number of parents and children were interviewed by the investigators. And some of the primary school children wrote essays about their playground experiences and preferences.

This study had numerous tables to show the relative popularity of various pieces of playground equipment (it would appear that swings are the most frequently used ~~equipment~~ equipment in most playgrounds) It provides an analysis of the choice of activities by individual children, the duration of their activity, and comparisons of activities of children of different ages and sexes. The use of charts and graphs simplifies the findings.

2/16/8 Although there are no definite recommendations in the report some implications are of particular significance. Here are a few quotes:-

"A trained leader makes it possible to offer other play materials, such as building blocks, easels, puppets and so on"

"Until children are about 10 years of age, most parents are reluctant to allow them to range very far from home without an escort"

"Playgrounds should be well within the estate, highly visible, and at a point where pedestrian routes converge"

"Playgrounds need a caretaker who has sufficient time and is convinced of the importance of the services provided"
(This was stated in relation to the importance of sand pits and paddling pools, both of which need to be kept clean) and then this comment was added:

"Further if W.C.s with adequate oversight by a caretaker were available close to a playground some of the objections to sand pits and to small enclosures ~~like~~ such as Wendy Houses, would be overcome."

"The most striking feature elicited by observation was the amount of 'inactive' play. This implies the provision of much more seating on the playground, not of the park bench type, but in a form which would enable a group of children to cluster together"

"It is difficult to translate a sense of mystery into three dimensions, but changes of level, visual barriers, screening part of the playground from the remainder, might help in this respect".

(There are 6 criteria above 1. Trained leader 2. Central ~~park~~ position, 3. Caretaker 4. W.C to enable wider range play ~~sat~~ places, 5. Places for "inactive" play 6. "Sense of mystery" design. Readers are invited to write in stating how many playgrounds of their experience measure up to the standards on how many points---and of course, any other comment you choose.)

(To strike a local note on another related subject: picnic playgrounds. Beside the Yarra Boulevard at Ivanhoe there is a little-known riverside park, Wilson Reserve. Recently, at this delightful natural bush picnic spot, Ellis Stone designed a childrens playground which could inspire a new era in landscaping for such facilities. One summer evening, in the not too distant future, pack your teak in a basket, the youngsters in the car, drive to Wilson Reserve, and see if it appeals to (a) the youngsters (b) only the adults : or (c) both youngsters and adults.)

3/16/8

2. Measuring Residential Car-Parking Needs

"Cars in Housing" has been produced by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in Britain and it deals in considerable technical detail with questions of parking and garaging of cars in residential areas, particularly in high density areas.

"Gamma" who draws the readers' attention to this book finds it too technical to review.

Wanted by "Irregular":~

(a) A technically knowledgeable person to review this book

(b) The same person to give opinions on two ideas:-

(i) In Housing Commission estates, or big OYO estates what would be the economic and technical feasibility of a complete underground storey covering the entire area, and turfed and landscaped on top?

Advantages:-

I. All cars could be undergrounded, so that

somewhat less total open space need be provided above-ground, helping towards the cost of the undergrounding, at the same time making a great deal more space available by people

2. Some noisy, even very noisy hobbies and activities could be accommodated, such as workshops for the handyman and hobbyists, club-room facilities where teenagers could have music, rooms for choirs or musicians, car-repair facilities for amateur mechanics, boat-builders etc. "rumpus rooms" for children in wet weather etc.

- (ii) Comment on the following (See Irregular 9/7/8) in relation to car-parking on private property in denser areas (a quote from "Cross-Section" Feb'67 p.3)

"Paul Ritter's proposed regulations for building in West Perth create an important precedent for the manipulation of by-laws to achieve results for which it would be undemocratic to legislate directly. ---to force parking out of sight the regulations require a minimum landscaped area of 50% and a maximum site cover of 50% so that cars are either under the garden or under the building, in a fully developed site. The cost of doing this makes the provision of car-parking a critical economic factor, and this is used to make mixed development the only way of developing any site. Parking spaces are required at the rate of 1.33 per flat or 1 per 500 square feet of office space whichever is the greater, so that parking spaces for schemes containing equal amounts of flats and offices are half those of urban schemes containing solely one or the other."

4/16/8

3. Measuring School Sportsground Needs

(by Ganam)

"Playing Fields and Hard Surfaces" produced by the British Ministry Department of Education and Science is a practical guide for those constructing and maintaining playing fields, particularly school playing fields.

It is based on experience and knowledge of local education authorities in Britain from 1956 to 1968, a period when nearly three thousand new primary schools and two thousand new secondary schools were completed in Britain.

This is an impressive handbook dealing with the technical aspects of laying the playground, the size and shape, the construction, the drainage, the growing of turf, the maintenance of every conceivable type of surface. There are clear well-labelled diagrams about construction problems, and the size of courts and fields.

This is a technical book on construction and maintenance but the significance of efficient supervision is emphasised:-

--- "The realisation that the efficient maintenance and proper use of the playing field are as important as the initial construction and cannot be achieved without the help of well-trained supervising ground staff"

(We know schools in inner Melbourne where the courts---no playing "fields"--are asphalt and on a slope, even a pronounced slope. Which State schools to your knowledge have the greenwards and turf wickets of Scotch College?)

4. Measuring Domestic Layout and Furniture Needs

(R
(Reviewed by "Alpha")

5/16/8 "Houses and People"--- A Review of User Studies at the Building Research Station, Ministry of Technology. HMSO publication 1966 S 4-95 (Aust. price) by W.V. Hole and J.J. Attenburrow.

A research group was set up in England after the last war with the intention of studying aspects of human requirements in dwellings in which the user himself has the voice of authority, that is to say, not those aspects relating to health and sanitation, but the design of rooms in relation to each other and in relation to the equipment and furniture within them.

The group was first within the Ministry of Works, and later as part of the Building Research Station, Ministry of Technology. The demand for systematic studies of social needs in relation to design did not stop there. For some years the London County Council and Ministry of Housing and Local Government have employed social scientists.

The survey is based on about 4000 families and deals in great detail with standards and trends of particular aspects, e.g. family activities in the home; day-rooms and kitchens; bedrooms, bathrooms and W.C.'s; the choice of furniture; heating; electric socket outlets and ownership of appliances; design of family houses; trend in design etc.

Here one can learn much un-ordinary and humble information. To take a sample:-

There is an analysis of no less than 27 types of household electrical appliances ranging from an iron (99% ownership) and T.V (83%) down to a toy train (6%) or aquarium (3%) in the year 1958. The figures are further broken down to the number of appliances used in each room of the house. The survey finds that "Although much of the equipment in use was in fact placed near the existing outlet positions, three-quarters of the householders had lengthened flexes so that they could use equipment elsewhere in the room. These flexes were often loosely laid under floor coverings, frequently crossing circulation paths in a room---" etc.

They found 6 to 9 power points per 3-bedroom house to be typical. They found not only the quantity but the positioning of power-points to be important.

On the basis of such analysis, the Building Research Station recommends 20 power-points for a 3-bedroom house, which was then subsequently recommended by both the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and they recommend their positioning in typical arrangements of doors, windows, room and furniture lay-out etc.

It is the virtue of the exercise that it does not make a static study. It is conscious of gradually increasing standards of amenities for low-income housing, and, (as in the recommendations for 20 power-points when 15 seemed

currently sufficient) casts its recommendations for the future.

"The main benefit to be arrived from an understanding of user needs, is in its application to the future housing programme " (p.54).

Changes in the family are dealt with. Marriage at an increasingly early age means that the change from a two-generation to a single-generation household occurs when the parents are only in early middle-age.

(Our conclusion from this: there should be increasing encouragement for each couple to have, in their lifetime, 3 homes. High-density when childless, low-density---if they choose---for the family, high-density again when their children marry)

Although the modern family may be more democratic, the question is raised, in view of the T.V or when visitors come "Has the growing ~~needs~~ recognition of the ~~needs~~ development needs of children (in contrast to the earlier view that they should be seen and not heard) led to an increased fragmentation of activities within the family--?" "---the type of relationships between family members and the amount of interaction that is desired, clearly affect requirements for privacy, both spatial and visual, and whether some barrier to the transmission of noise is also implied " (p55.)

Studying changing leisure activities, the survey concludes: "Demand for more space in the home might well take the form of an area suited to various craft activities, together with suitable storage space for equipment" (p.61)

(One comment: Urgently required for "Irregular" is a review of book "Privacy and Community" by Chermayeff and Alexander ~~which~~ which has most radical design proposals incorporating solutions to the problems here raised.

(A further comment: There is a trend in America for "affluent" working people to have bigger and bigger houses. The same trend "to keep up with the Joneses" seems to be starting in Australia. Making due allowance for privacy, storage and "rumpus rooms", is it not important to have an optimum size for each purpose, design being concentrated on saving as much space as possible? Excess space not only means waste of money on shelter, and more housework, when applied to high-density areas, it lowers the density. Incidentally: what price Canberra's "House of the Year" built for Prof Birch from University funds, the same year as student fees are raised---55 squares! Yes, 55! The judges should be ashamed of themselves! It cost 80,000 dollars! Its own swimming pool, of course! Not a community one. Actually would make a cosy little student hostel. No wonder students get to wanting student power!)
"Herald" 5-11-68

The above four books mentioned are all His Majesties Stationary Office publications. Have we in Australia come parable researches proceeding?

6/16/8

5. Should the Factory Be a Community Centre?

In Australia there are hundreds of factory and office social clubs which organise children's Christmas parties and other social activities.

To the extent that such gatherings are controlled by the employees, they tend to have continuous existence. On the

other hand, social life around the factories are often sponsored by the employers, and though they may flourish for a short time, they have no solid basis for existence.

For example, in the 1930s hundreds of unskilled workers were organised into basket ball teams by the union movement, especially the girls in the clothing and textile industries. In the late 40's and early 50's many of these teams were recruited directly through the personnel officer at the factory, and thus instead of consolidating the union activity of the young people, sport was used to build loyalists to the firm. The network of basket ball teams based on factories, hardly now exists.

In some countries, particularly the socialist countries, the factory is very much a social centre. In 1966, the writer visited the Soviet Union. At the Moscow tram depot the writer saw a large recreation hall and theatre. Young people were rehearsing a dance on the stage. In one corner of the hall was a special area for the displaying of handwork which had been done by the children of the factory workers while they were holidaying at a children's camp. This camp was owned and controlled by the Factory Trade Union Committee. Similarly at a chocolate factory in Estonia, and a watch factory in Armenia, there were various facilities to enable the factory workers to enjoy recreation, education and culture on the factory premises. At each factory we visited we were told of the number of sports teams organised through the factory, and often other circles were described to us. For example, at the Moscow Tram Depot there is a Friendship with Australia circle. In their library they have books by Australian authors (in Russian) and in their "circle" meetings they gather information on Australia and discuss our country. In a Leningrad pre-fabricated building factory there was a campaign in progress for every factory worker to be "well educated", and only a small proportion were not studying.

The compact nature of European cities makes it more reasonable for the factory or office to serve as a social centre. Our suburban sprawl is not so conducive to such a development.

However, at some factories, for example Erricsons in Broadmeadows, the management has established a day nursery for the children of mothers who work at the factory. In Victoria, the Union of Australian Women has called on the Government to subsidise municipal day nurseries, and the resolution goes on: "We also ask the Trades Hall Council to examine the possibility of including the establishment of day nurseries in factories employing large numbers of ~~workers~~ women as trade union policy"

It is quite possible therefor that in some areas and in some industries the factories could become one form of lively social life, and the more likely this would be the more firmly such activities enjoyed union sponsorship.

7/16/8

6.2 Should the Church be a Community Centre ?

For hundreds of years the Church has been one of the important social centres. Two new features favouring a richer social life are combining of different denominations and re-designing Church properties so that less space is used for formal worship, allowing a greater area for social gatherings. The Church of England owns 145 acres in Glebe, Waverly and Randwick NSW and will redevelop to the tune of \$100 m. Will the Church, thus become a town-creator plan for the social needs of the people in this project ?

(More wanted, please, on this subject. Any volunteers?)